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AUTHOR England, Rhonda George
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ABSTRACT

In 1899, Katherine Pettit and May Stone established the first social settlement in the Kentucky mountains. In Chautauqua-like fashion, the women pitched tents in and around the vicinity of Knott County, Kentucky for three consecutive summers. The primary purposes of the social settlement were social justice and community uplift. While the women found many of the older, more traditional aspects of Appalachian culture preferable to the changing values in the more industrialized areas, they also found many elements in the culture that were backward, especially as they affected health and education. In order to help the mountaineers become self-sufficient, the women believed they should teach the people to make the best use of what they had. The influence of Pettit's and Stone's efforts was far-reaching and inadvertently brought about (according to Whisnant, 1983) cultural losses; however, the modern notions of childhood and the woman's role that Pettit and Stone brought to Appalachia also resulted in important cultural gain. The primary issues concerning Pettit and Stone were the lack of good educational facilities, the mountaineers' attitude that schooling was irrelevant, and the lack of opportunity for mental and spiritual development of the children. Kindergarten classes established at the settlement school not only helped the children, but also helped their mothers by allowing them time to attend classes on home improvement and the supplementation of available domestic resources. (ALL)

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BRINGING MODERN NOTIONS OF CHILDHOOD AND MOTHERHOOD TO PREINDUSTRIAL APPALACHIA: Katherine Pettit and May Stone, 1899-1901

by Rhonda George England

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BRINGING MODERN NOTIONS OF CHILDHOOD AND MOTHERHOOD TO PREINDUSTRIAL APPALACHIA: Katherine Pettit and May Stone, 1899-1901

> When asked how old a dirty but bright looking baby was, the mother said,"Waal people, I don't know how old hit is."
> excerpt from Katherine Pettit's account of Camp Sassafras 1901

In the summer of 1899, Katherine Pettit and May Stone along with other teacher/volunteers from the Bluegrass section of Kentucky, established the first social settlement in the Kentucky mountains. In Chautauqua-like-fashion,the women pitched tents in and around the vicinity of Knott County,Kentucky for three consecutive summers. In an attempt to accomodate the settlement to the region, Pettit and Stone established the first rural settlement school in 1902, and in 1915, the town of Hindman incorporated the school providing it with the permanent title of Hindman Settlement School.

As the primary purposes of the social settlement were social justice and community uplift, one can assume that Pettit and Stone's work in Appalachia, was motivated in part, by a belief that the mountaineer had been neglected. While the women found many of the older more traditional aspects of Appalachian culture perferable to the changing values in the more industrialized areas of the country, they also found many elements in the culture that were backward, especially in the areas of health and education. In order to help the mountaineer to help himself, the women believed they should "teach the mountaineers to make the best use of the material they had."[1]

In All That Is Native and Fine (1983) David Whisnant examines "the politics of culture" at Hindman Settlement School.

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Whisnant's argument focuses on two major points: (1) the women professed a reverence for mountain culture and hoped to offset the dire effects of impending industrialization, but inadvertedly they themselves became powerful instigators of cultural change[2]:(2) the women, like clergymen of the time took a very cautious approach to social issues.[3]

Whisnant's argument places him in a paradoxical situation similar to the one he assigns to Pettit and Stone. On the one hand, he argues that the women brought some of the very changes they hoped to forestall(modernity). On the other hand, he argues that the women were too conservative in their approach; in other words, they did not affect enough change. Perhaps, part of Whisnant's dilemma stems from his point of view. That is,Whisnant addresses only one side of the issue; the cultural losses incurred by modernization thorugh schooling.

Cultural conflict or the losses and gains incurred through schooling has long been a major concern in educational historiography. Because schooling as a socializing agent has had the double agenda of preservation and assimilation; the outcomes of schooling have always appeared to be contradictory. So in order to strengthen their point of view many scholars focus primarily on one side of the loss/gain issue. However, Lawrence Cremin reminds us that the loss is inherent in the gain and the combination is a continuum or what he refers to as "generic polarity." That is, schooling like education in general,"never liberates without at the same time limiting. It never empowers without at the same time constraining. It never frees without at the same time socializing."[4] Therefore, Cremin says, the important question to be addressed is not whether the losses

and gains are occurring in isolation, but what the balance is and to what end and in light of what alternatives.

We are indebted to Whisnant for revealing the cultural losses the mountaineer incurred through the process of schooling; a process that began in the summer settlements when the teachers began to plaster on modern notions by teaching Appalachian boys and girls such things as "how to make a cake with chocolate icing, dress a chicken properly, cook beans without lard and sing songs to the accompaniment of a portable reed organ."[5] However, this paper hopes to extend and balance Whisnant's work by looking at the cultural gains that Pettit's and Stone's modern notions of childhood and women's role brought to Appalachia at the turn of the century.

The concepts of childhood and adolescence are social constructs. Therefore, we must remember that Pettit's and Stone's notions of childhood and adolescence were part of an evolving process. Although educators and youth workers between the years 1900 and 1920 worked under the assumption that childhood and adolescence would soon become a universal experience, variations in the regional and class life-styles of the nation delayed both the attitudes and the institutions, so that the concepts did not become a universal in this country until the 1950's.[6] For that reason, it is difficult to label Pettit and Stone's views or approaches to social issues in Appalachia as conservative or progressive during that time period.

For example, although Pettit and Stone were probably involved in the child labor problems in the Bluegrass, child

labor in itself was not an issue in their early reports of Appalachia. An explanation for this is found in the 1919, report of the Child Labor Committee. The report cites the popular conception of child labor as employment for wages in factories, mines and stores, farm work was not considered, because the farm was usually viewed as an ideal place for children.[7]

Therefore, when Pettit and Stone comment on the children working it is not the work alone that is the primary issue but the lack of good educational facilities and the mountaineers' attitude toward schooling as something irrelevant in their lives that receives the emphasis. Pettit says,

> The play life of the child is cramped. They go early into the fields and from there to the school room about the middle of July. The schools have to begin in summer and close before cold weather, because the buildings are not warm enough and the children cannot walk over the mountains and down the swollen streams in winter. Mr. Combs, although one of the best teachers in the County, does not realize the responsibility of his calling. For the last four weeks he has had no school, he gave two weeks for foddering and the other time he has been away hunting criminals. 8

Pettit and Stone probably realized the need for children to work in the self-sufficient farm economy, but they were concerned about the lack of opportunity for the mental and spiritual development of the children. The settlement teachers' emphasis on the importance of "play life" for the children was perhaps one of the strangest notions that the women brought to preindustrial Appalachia. Because in most cases mountain parents expected the children to act like adults. May Stone

describes the parents' lack of knowledge concerning the play life or imagination in the child:

> The mother told me that Tilda, who is the older of the two girls,of five and six, is known all over the community as "the worst child that ever wuz,"that she would slip and put on long dresses and walk around and say she was somebody else and fool that way all day." I tried to explain to them that this imagination was a good thing if well directed, but she said 'hit was pure meanness and she ought to be killed for 'hit.[9]

It is apparent from these excerpts that Pettit and Stone viewed the child as one who needed to be nurtured or as Susan Blow described it "nudged" into being. For that reason, the concept of childhood represented by the kindergarten program at the settlements was probably one of the most modern notions that the settlement teachers brought to the region. The similarities in the goals of the kindergarten and the social settlement were so similar that Nina Vandewalker said "the settlement has often been referred to as a kindergarten for adults."[10]

Both the kindergarten movement and the social settlement movement resulted from a spiritual enlightment that had its origin in Europe. They both proclaimed a kind of "new gospel" -- that of man as a creative being, and both saw education as a process of development. Therefore, Pettit's and Stone's emphasis on the importance of the "play life" of the child was not a trivial notion, it was the crucial first step in the philosophy of Friedrich Froebel,who saw "education as a continuation of the world's unceasing evolution on the level of consciousness, with the child's play being the first signs of life's urge toward purposeful activity."[11]

Not only were flights of fantasy forbidden to mountain children but the presence of toys was a very unusual thing. Although the Presbyterian Sunday School had distributed some dolls in the region prior to the settlement of 1899, Pettit says "the dolls were never in the arms of the children." In one home where there was a large family of girls, Pettit says they counted six dolls disposed on the wall"cruelly out of reach of the children." "The dolls were objects of beauty only, not living, breathing, loving babies to be carefully dressed and cared for and punished."[12]

However, securing the mountain child with a play life was only one step in Pettit's and Stone's attempts to foster some kind of spiritual activity for the children. For not only were children expected to behave like adults, in many cases they were allowed the same privileges that are usually confined to the adult world.

In Appalachia the children "were allowed the use of tobacco as soon as they could walk and talk,"[13] and their indulgences in alcoholic beverages often had devastating consequences. Pettit says one young boy, about twelve years old, came to borrow a book from the circulating library."He had a lame hand, with the bullet showing plainly in his wrist where he had shot himself while he was drunk."[14] While the settlement teachers used temperance pledges and/or the "love of God" to encourage the children to relinquish these negative habits, their work with the mothers was also an essential part of the process.

In "Let Us Live with Our Children: Kindergarten Movements in Germany and the United States, 1840-1911," Ann Taylor Allen says one of the reasons that the kindergarten flourished more in the United States during its early years than it did in Froebel's native Germany, was the difference in the conservativ and liberal political traditions of the two countries. Allen uses German sociologist Ralf Dahrendorf's work to substantiate her findings. Darhendorf relates public/private boundaries to conservative and liberal political traditions. He lists Germany as one of the conservative societies because it promoted the private or inward-turning virtues, such as piety, profundity, and a strict maintainance of public and private boundaries. The United States is included in the liberal list of countries because it promotes the public virtues of sociability,good citizenship, and political responsibility. Because cultural definitions of the private sphere during the nineteenth-century were assigned to women and children, the kindergarten movement which was an attempt to join the private with the public was much too liberal for Germany during that time period. Allen says, "the kindergarten movement, which in both Germany and America was often led by women, exemplified a major theme of nineteenth-century feminism: an attempt to redefine public/private boundaries that, as interpreted by patriarchal culture, condemned both women and children to confinement and subjection."[15]

Even though Pettit and Stone came from the Bluegrass section of Kentucky there is little doubt that the society they came from was male dominated, however, coming from the upper or upper/middle class provided them with freedoms that did not exist for many women during that time period. In Appalachia, they found a patriarchal culture that was in many ways distinct from their own. As Pettit writes,

> It is the deplorable condition of the women that appeals so strongly to me. Their condition is truly wretched. The domestic life of the mountaineer is crude. They know absolutely nothing of descent living. How can they when the women who should be fitted for housekeepers and homemakers are doing the work of men,who think their duty consists in hunting ,fishing and sitting on the fence talking politics.While the women hurriedly cook their meals and spend the rest of the time in cultivating crops, building fences and milking cows...
> Many of the country women marry, have large families and die without ever having the diversion of a visit to the little village of their county. The poor unfortunates who have not even this one opportunity must spend their lives, as Miss Henderson down on Laurel Fork told us "jest bummin' around among their folks." 16

When the mountain women brought their children to the kindergarten classes at the settlement it was the policy of the settlement to involve them in classes also. Teaching the women home improvement through sewing, cooking, weaving or grooming was the settlement's way of supplementing rather than supplanting the family's role and further integrating the individual into society. Realizing the rigid restraints of their gender and their "fotched-on" or outsiders role in Appalachia one has to appreciate Pettit's and Stone's rather daring attempts to uplift the role of both women and children in Appalachia.In the following passage Pettit describes one of the daily ways that the settlement women

attempted to uplift women's role:

> The people were unusually kind to us. Mr. Sam Kilgore, one of the lawyers, sent a cow for us to use. Monroe Maggard, our hired boy, said that he could not milk, that boys and men did not milk in the mountains. But we did not intend to set any such example to the women, so, we told Monroe that he must learn. Miss Breckinridge went to one of the neighbors to learn and then undertook to teach him. At first the cow refused to let the boy milk her, but we all gathered around her and kept her in place, while Monroe learned. One had to keep the flies from her head, one hold the bucket, while the boy milked. In a short while he could milk alone, but he never was a success and whenever we wanted an extra supply of milk, Arminta, the hired girl, would help him. many people from the country would look on in amazement to see a boy milk and were much more surprised when we told them that the men did the milking in the level country and that women did not work in the field.(We finally had to put a skirt on the boy to fool the cow).[17]

So while David Whisnant has revealed some of the cultural losses that the mountaineer incurred through the process of schooling,one can see by these brief examples that Whisnant's work does not tell the whole story. For the work that Katherine Pettit and May Stone carried on with the women and children in Appalachia should certainly be recognized as cultural gains.Whisnant appears to hold a rather mixed kind of view . For in one sense he sees the culture as something static and at the same time he dreams of change. All That Is Native and Fine may be limited because it is written from a male's point of view, that looks for the "big happenings" or "great events" and underestimates the amazing transformations that a group of women can make with the subtleties of a pen or needle.

NOTES

[1]"Camp Cedar Grove summer 1899" author unknown,Hindman Settlement School Archives,Hindman,Kentucky p.6.

[2]David E. Whisnant *All That Is Native and Fine:The Politics of Culture in an American Region* (Chapel Hill:The University of North Carolina Press,1983) p.48.

[3]Ibid.p.15.

[4]Lawrence A. Cremin *Traditions of American Education* (New York: Basic Books,1976) pp.36-37.

[5]Whisnant,p.48.

[6]Joseph Kett,*Rites of Passage* (New York: Basic Books,1977) p.245.

[7]Mrs. Loriane B. Bush "Child Labor" *Child Welfare in Kentucky* New York: The National Child Labor Committee,1919, p.200.

[8]Katherine Pettit, "Camp Sassafras" 1901 Hindman Settlement School Archives, Hindman, Kentucky p.25.

[9]May Stone, "Camp Sassafras" 1901 Hindman Settlement School Archives Hindman,Kentucky p.76.

[10]Nina C.Vandewalker *The Kindergarten in American Education* New York: Macmillan, 1908, p. 38.

[11]Friedrich Froebel, *The Education of Man* trans. W.N. Hailmann (New York:D. Appleton,1887) p35.

[12]Pettit,"Camp Industrial" summer 1900 Hindman Settlement School Archives, Hindman,Kentucky p.54.

[13]"Camp Cedar Grove" 1899 p. 6.

[14]Pettit,"Camp Sassafras" 1901, p.11.

[15]Ann Taylor Allen "Let Us live with Our Children: Kindergarten Movement in Germany and the United States,1940-1911," *History of Education Quarterly* Spring 1988,p.24.

[16]Pettit (letter) 1899

[17]Pettit "Camp Industrial" 1900 p.20.